



Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

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Dear Manuela,

Thank you for your letter of 14 April to the Secretary of State, on behalf of a number of your constituents, regarding the proposed solar farm development in your constituency. I am responding as this matter falls under my Ministerial portfolio. I apologise for the delay in response.

Given the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in taking decisions on applications for development consent for energy infrastructure proposals, it would not be appropriate to comment on specific matters related to individual proposals, as this could be seen as prejudicing the decision-making process. However, I can address many of the broader issues raised in your letter.

The Government is committed to achieving clean power by 2030. This is an ambitious mission which has enormous potential to create good jobs, protect billpayers, ensure energy security, and reduce our exposure to volatile fossil fuel markets. The scale of this challenge is such that, as part of the rollout of various renewable energy sources, we will need to see significant increases in the deployment of both ground-mounted and rooftop solar. All solar projects are subject to a rigorous planning process, in which the views and interests of the local community and local authority are considered. The National Policy Statements for energy (EN-1) and renewable energy infrastructure (EN-3) provide clear guidance on the requirements for developers to consult with Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies and to minimise impacts on the use of agricultural land, the local environment, landscapes, and local amenities.

Larger projects are also required to complete an Environmental Statement as part of their planning applications. The statement requires developers to consider all potential impacts throughout a project's life, from pre-development to construction, operation, and decommissioning. It also considers the cumulative impacts of multiple projects in an area. This may include impacts on population and human health, material assets, cultural heritage, and the landscape, as well as biodiversity, land, soil, water, air, and climate. Once built, solar farms can usually be screened by hedges and other vegetation, and visual impact is carefully considered during the planning process. They operate almost silently without pollution and, once operational, generate very little maintenance traffic.

Planning policy and guidance also make clear that all sources of flood risk, now and in the future, need to be considered in solar planning applications, including the risk of surface water flooding. Section 2.4.11 of the National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (NPS EN-3) acknowledges that solar photovoltaic sites may be proposed in low-lying areas, provided they are resilient to flooding and higher temperatures.

Furthermore, through the Clean Power Action Plan, we have made clear that, where communities host clean energy infrastructure, we will ensure they benefit from it. There are many options in this area, including community funds, direct support for households, as well as community ownership.

We have published a working paper seeking views on introducing a mandatory community benefit fund scheme for low-carbon energy infrastructure. We are currently analysing responses to the working paper and will issue a response in due course.

Thank you again for taking the time to write. I hope this information is useful.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Shanks', followed by a period. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MICHAEL SHANKS MP
Minister of State for Energy